

A  
DISCOURSE  
TO PROVE

That the strongest *Temptations* are Conquerable

BY

CHRISTIANS:

OR,

A Sober defence of NATURE and GRACE,  
Against the Cavils, and Excuses of loose inconsiderate Men.

IN A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

Right Honourable the LORD MAYOR  
of London, and Court of ALDERMEN,  
The 14th of January, 1677.

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By GEORGE HICKES, B.D.

Chaplain to his Grace the Lord Duke of Lauderdale,  
And Fellow of Linc. Coll. Oxon.

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*I can do all things through Christ, that strengtheneth me.*  
Phil. 4. 13.

*Ye are of God little Childaen, and have over-come them,  
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the  
world.* 1 Joh. 4. 4.

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L O N D O N,

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## DAVIES MAYOR.

*Martis xxiiij. die Januarii, 1676. Annoq; Regni  
Regis CAROLI secundi, Anglie, &c. xxviiij.*

**T**His Court doth desire Mr. *Hicks* to Print his  
Sermon lately Preach'd at the *Guild-Hall*  
Chappel, before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen  
of this City.

*Wagstaffe.*

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## IMPRIMATUR,

*Guil. Jane, R. P. D.  
Hen. Episc. Lond. à  
Sacris dom.*

*Feb. 16. 1676.*





To the Right Honourable  
**Sir THOMAS DAVIES,**  
Lord Mayor of LONDON,  
AND  
The Court of ALDERMEN.

My Lord;

**I** Have a singular veneration for your Lordship, and the Court, which makes me submit my Judgment to yours, and publish this Discourse, to comply with your joint request, which I think as obliging as any Command. Your Authority, more than all the interest I have in it, will recommend it to the World, and if it be but read with as much satisfaction, as your Honours heard it, it will answer the ends of its Publication, and prove as useful, as it is suitable to the necessities of the age. 'Tis a sad thing to consider, that there should be an occasion for such a Discourse as this, and nothing reflects more dishonour upon the Gospel, or more grieves and disheartens the Ministers thereof, then to see themselves constrain'd by Mens extravagant Opinions, to Preach up  
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those Truths, they ought to presuppose. But so, my Lord, it is, that Mens Errors and Vices give us subjects for Sermons, as they sometimes give our Law-givers matter for their Laws, and particularly Scepticisme, which is nothing but Infidelity in several dresses and degrees, so possesses the Minds of Men, that instead of Preaching up Practical Divinity, we are often constrain'd to insist upon Doctrinal Points. Instead of perswading Men to the Love of God, we are fain now and then to prove that he is, instead of urging them to have a care of their Souls, we are forc'd to prove, that their Souls are beings worthy of their care, and instead of pressing them to resist all manner of Temptations, and Pray for the Grace of God, we sometimes find it needful, first to convince them, that they have power to resist them, and that his Grace is a real thing. This bitter root of unbelief is the Reason, why the Gospel hath no better success in the World, and one of the true causes, why so many Men have a secret ill-will for the Ministers of it, because they are an Order of Men set aside to maintain the everlasting Truths of God, and oppose themselves to those impious Opinions, by which they are willing to Damn their Souls. But were other Men, my Lord, as Orthodox, and understood their Religion as well as you, there would be no occasions for such Discourses as this, but we should wholly set our selves to press home upon Mens Consciences the practical Duties of Religion, and by that means make the Preaching part of Divinity more  
delight-



delightful to our selves, and much more profitable to the Church of God. We should not then complain so much of the unsuccessfulness of our labours, but see more of the travel of our Souls, when the work of our Lord did prosper in our hands.

But whether we Preach Practically, or whether we Preach about Speculative Truths, we do the Work of him that sent us; by the former, we reform Mens Vices, by the latter, we confute their Errors, by both we keep their Consciences awake, and make it impossible for them to live without remorse, or dye in their Sins without fear. So that the Ministerial Function, were it meerly Humane, must needs be confessed to be an excellent Institution, and its greatest Enemies cannot but acknowledge, that the Pulpit conduces as much as the Bench, to preserve Civil Order, and restrain the exorbitant Passions of Men. In particular, my Lord, were it not for us, this populous City, which is now so happy in your Government, would be far more Wicked than it is, and both your Honour, and all other Ministers of Criminal Justice, would have much more Employment for their Axes and Rods. As for you, my Lord, your Honour, by your diligent and impartial Administration of Justice hath testified to the World, that you bear not the Sword in vain. For ever since it was put into your hands, you have severely Punished Vice, and reform'd more disorders, and disorderly Persons, than I have opportunity here to  
re-

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relate. The World sees , and the City feels the effects  
of your good Government : Good Men Honour you , bad  
Men Fear you , God will Bless you , and Posterity will  
mention your Name with Praise. In particular , none  
Honours you more for your private and political Virtues ,  
than ,

My Lord ,

Your Lordships most humble Servant ,

GEORGE HICKES.

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I Cor.



I Cor. 10. 13.

*There bath no Temptation taken you, but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the Temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

**A** Lthough the Substance of that Baptismal Oath of Allegiance, which every *Christian* takes at his entrance into Covenant with God, be, to renounce the World, the Flesh, and the Devil ; and although this solemn obligation be laid by God and the Church upon the Conscience of every *Christian*, to make him more vigilant and resolute in resisting the Temptations which the World without, the Flesh within, or the Devil both ways can present unto him : Yet to the scandal both of our Nature and Religion, there have often been, and now are in the Church of God, a sort of licentious perjur'd

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*Christians,*

## Strongest Temptations

*Christians*, who taking a pride to aggravate the weakness of Humane Nature, and undervalue the power of Gods assisting Grace, represent it as impossible for sinful Flesh and Blood to overcome the Pleasures of some, and the Terrours of other Temptations; and so make Religion itself, which is nothing, but the practice of resisting Pain and Pleasure out of love to God, an idle Romantick notion, and in effect, renounce their Baptismal Vow.

But to the lewd Pretensions, and authority of these most insolent Men, my Text is an apparent contradiction, and reproof; wherein the Apostle assures the suffering *Corinthians*, that, as among all the sharp Trials and Persecutions they had undergone for Religion, none had happen'd to them, but such as were ἀνθεκτικαί, proportionable to the Nature of Man, or such as others before them had endur'd: So for the future he likewise assures them, that God, who was faithful to his Promises, would not suffer them to be tempted above their Strength; but upon the due exercise of their patience and courage in resisting, would make a way for them to escape in all their Trials, and give them sufficient supplies of his Grace to support and overcome the violence thereof.

*There hath no Temptation taken you, (saith he) but  
such*

*such as is moderate or common to man, for God is faithful, who will not, &c.*

This is the true and obvious meaning of these words; and therefore by good analogy both of Faith and Reason, we may conclude, that God, who is acquainted with the infirmities of our Nature, takes the same care of us in all other Trials and Temptations, as the Apostle here assures us he doth in *persecutions*; which are in this and many other places of the Gospel emphatically called *Temptations*, because that of all the Trials which men can undergo for the sake of God and Religion, those terrible pains and sufferings wherein persecutions consist, are by far most difficult to be withstood by feeble Flesh and Blood.

But what need is there of proving so great a Truth by consequence and analogy, when the promise of the Spirit, (that assistant form of *Christians*;) is the most general promise of the Gospel, and one of the principal terms upon which we are encouraged to enter into Covenant with God? For we bind our selves by our Sacramental Oaths, to resist such Temptations as unassisted Humane Nature is not able to resist, because we are assur'd from the beginning to the end of the New Testament; *That God will give his Spirit to them that sincerely ask it, that the Graces of it are sufficient for us, that he will perfect his Strength in Human Weak-*

ness, and that he will make us more than conquerours in all Temptations, and find out a way by which we shall escape. A considerable part of the Gospel consists in such like promises of receiving sufficient assistance from God; and indeed it had been inconsistent with his Wisdom and Goodness, as he is the Author of the Covenant of *Grace*, to require us to swear resistance against such Temptations as depraved Human Nature is not able to withstand, unless withal he would have given us concurrent supplies of supernatural Strength, sufficient to support us in them, and enable us to perform what he doth exact.

This then being certain, that God stands bound in his Gospel to take special care to assist us in all Temptations, and grant us sufficient supplies of his Grace, I proceed to prove the Apostles consequence, That no Temptations how violent soever, are irresistible by *Christians*, or that no Temptation or Trial hath or ever shall happen by Gods permission unto any Person in Covenant with him, but such as is suitable to the Powers of Human Nature strengthened by Grace, and such as a reasonable considerate Man that duly uses and improves the present assistance of God, may not easily conquer and subdue.

This assertion I shall prove two ways; First, by authority or precedent; and Secondly, by reason.

First,

First, by *authority*, taken from the practice and examples of wise and sober Men in all Ages, who have resisted the strongest, and overcome the most difficult Temptations for the sake of God; and therefore those Traiterous ungodly *Christians*, who love to represent the cause of Virtue and Religion as desperate and indefensible, contradict the experiences of Ages, and belye the Records both of God and Man.

I shall but instance in three or four of the most violent assur'd Temptations, which the Devils and their cursed Agents use as the strongest battery to subdue the souls of the bravest Men.

The first whereof, is the fear of *Death*, which *Bildad in Job*, calls מלך בלחוח the King of Consternations, or Terrors; and yet as terrible as are the approaches of this King of Terrors, the brave adventures of those gallant *Heathens*, who have met him with all his train of Terrors, without astonishment and fear, and sacrific'd their lives for their Country and Friends: These generous souls, I say, who could scarce dye for higher ends, infallibly shew, that 'tis so far from being impossible, that 'tis neither strange, nor difficult for Reason without Grace, or unassisted Humane Nature, to overcome the fear of Death.

But then if we consult the Records of the Church, we shall find the supreme motives of  
Reli-



Religion to have made Cowards, and common People valiant, and the Spirit of God, which the *Jewish* Writers call the Spirit of Might, so to have fortifi'd the Courage of Women and Children; as to make them dye with more Resolution, than the Worthies of *Greece* and *Rome*.

The time would fail, as the Author to the *Hebrews* speaks, in telling of *those that were ston'd, sawn asunder, (a) empaled, and slain with the Sword.* And the *Jewish* and *Christian* Martyrologies; the bloody Calendars of the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches; the Histories of the Persecutions of the *Jews* by the *Heathens*, of the *Christians* by them both, and of the former and latter Reformers by the Papal See, from the time of the *Waldenses*, to this last Age, are so many standing Acts and Monuments to prove, that no tryals can happen to Men, but what Humane Nature is able to bear, and particularly that Death in all his array of Terrors is no such insuperable consideration, when it stands in competition with our Duty to God.

The *Spanish Christians* in the time of *Trajan*, behav'd themselves with such resolution, and assurance at the *Heathen* Tribunals, that his Procurator and their Judge *Pliny* mistook their constancy and perseverance for stubbornness of Opinion, or a certain Superstitious obstination of Mind. And afterwards in the *tenth Persecution*, they

(a) *vid.*  
*inadversos*  
*s. honorabilis*  
*doctif. Nort.*  
*natchbulli,*  
*u. aur. in Ep.*  
*Hebr. c. 11.*  
7.



they so little regarded their Lives, that they threw them away, and offer'd unnecessary affronts to the *Heathen* Gods, that so they might be sure to dye *Martyrs* in the Fact, and have the honour to Seal the Truth with their Blood. Infomuch that the Wise Council of (a) *Eliberis* was fain to make a Decree to correct such unwarrantable riotous Zeal, and make them less prodigal of their Blood. But both they, and the more Primitive *Christians* of other Countrys would have dy'd, had it been possible a thousand times, rather than drop a grain of Incense, bow before an Idol, or do any other significant Action, which Custom had made a sign of denying Christ.

(a) *Ex. Confil. Elib. anno. 335. si quis idola vgerit, & ibidem fuerit occisus placuit numerum eorum nonne ipsi Martyrum.*

And since the corruption of the *Latin Church*, the noble Army of reformed *Martyrs* in these *Western* parts of the World, have chosen to meet the King of Terrors in his most terrible appearance, I mean in the dreadful *Inquisition*, and endure the most painful sorts of death, rather than Worship a Cake of Bread, Invoke their Fellow-creatures, admit any Advocate in Heaven but Jesus, or make the Gospel depend upon the dictates of the *Pope*, how illiterate and wicked soever he may be. But were there no other Histories extant but the *Bible*, the number of the Saints recorded there, that have embraced the most bitter *Ignominious Deaths*, and despised the

the Torments and Shame thereof, are more than enough to prove, that there is no Temptation so dreadful, but what may be born by Man, and that 'tis neither impossible, nor so exceeding difficult for *Christians* to conquer the fear of Death, as the profane and sensual part of the World, to the dishonour of our Religion, pretend it to be.

The second instance, under which I shall bring examples to prove, that no Temptation is irresistible, shall be taken from the Sin of Unclean-ness, or *fornication*, a Sin which the World is so apt to excuse, and pretend a kind of necessity to commit, because it is so natural to Flesh and Blood. And yet as natural and hereditary as the Advocates of Unclean-ness represent it to be 'tis so far from being an irresistible Temptation, that *Joseph* resisted the frequent importunities of his own Lady or Mistress, although besides the quality of her Person, and the danger of denying, his own Youth, and all other circumstances concurr'd to make him consent and Yield. And were the dread of the Majesty of the Pure and Holy God, impress'd upon the heart of the most lustful Satyr, but half as deep, as it was upon his, that Grace alone would be sufficient to check his sinful propensions, and make him cry out as he did in the critical moment of Tryal, *How shall I do this damnable act, and sin against my God.*

But

But lest you should object that *Joseph* was an extraordinary person, and had more than common assistance from God; let us suppose the most ordinary unexperienc'd *Christian* surrounded with the strongest Temptations imaginable, to commit this natural, and therefore concluded unconquerable Sin; Let us suppose him to have the most charming Beauty to entice him, together with opportunity, and all other Circumstances to heighten the Temptation, and make it as outrageous as it can be imagin'd to be; yet for all this, if this Man should say that he were not able to resist this violent Temptation, he would lye against his Conscience, and contradict the universal experience of the World. For if at that instant God should say unto him, as unto the *Rich Man* in the Gospel, *Thou Fool, this night thy Soul shall be required of thee*; That dreadful Summons to appear so soon in the next World, would make this mighty Temptation become none at all, and presently drive out that unclean Spirit of Lust which possesseth his Soul before. But much more, if at the same time should come forth the Fingers of a Mans hand, and write upon the Wall, *Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharzin*, Do this, and thou shalt be immediately damned; I desire any one of you to Answer in his heart for this Man, what you think he would do: You cannot but

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confess, that his Amorous intentions and Countenance would be chang'd, his jovial Thoughts troubled, his Joints loos'd, and his Knees like King *Belshazzar's*, knock one against another. Or lastly, let us suppose at the same instant, that an unexpected Message should come from his Prince, threatening the Gibbet, or the Ax, if he proceeded to gratifie his sinful Desires; such a terrible Message would undoubtedly be sufficient to extinguish his present Flames, and restrain him from the Sin he intended to commit. Or not to take the advantage of such frightful Enemies to his *Pleasure*, as Damnation or Death, let us rather suppose, That a little Child, much more a Grave and Reverend Person, should unexpectedly come into the Room before he proceeded to execute his filthy Lust; certainly instead of finding it impossible to resist the Damnable Sin, he would find it impossible for him to commit it in their presence, unless he had made an utter shipwreck both of his Conscience and Honour, and were become as shameless as a Beast. Or, let us suppose that a mighty reward, imagin a Kingdom, or some vast Sum of Money were offer'd him upon condition he would resist this pretended irresistible Temptation, what do you think would be the event? You must needs confess he would find Strength and Resolution enough to overcome  
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the unconquerable Temptation upon these terms, and be glad to be hired by such a Reward, to abstain from his Damnable Lust. And therefore, if all this be true, Why should not the remembrance of our own Mortality as effectually Mortifie our Lusts, and keep us from daring to commit a presumptuous Sin, as if God himself should tell us we should shortly dye? Why should not the consideration of Eternal Torments threatened in the Gospel, be as perswasive against Sin, as the consideration of them written by a *Spirit* upon a Wall? Or why should not the Message of Eternal Death which we deliver from God, prevail as much upon Men, as the Message of temporal Death from a King? Lastly, why should not the presence of the Omnipresent God overawe Men more than the presence of a Man? Or, why should not the Infallible Promise of Heaven and Infinite Happiness, be a more powerful motive to Self-denial, than the Promise of a Kingdom, or Treasure here below?

The shameful inconsideration, stupidity, and carnality of Mens hearts, is the cause why Temporal expectations and proposals have more force upon their Souls, than the hopes of Eternal Glory; and that present or approaching sensible Pain or Loss, fills their earthy Minds with more dreadful apprehensions, than the prospect of Infinite Misery to come.

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But to conclude this Instance with a more familiar Argument; If the Temptations to this Sin be so very difficult to be resisted, as Debauch'd Men pretend it is, how comes it to pass, that careful and Religious Parents suffer their Children to Sojourn in *Mejeh*, and dwell in the Tents of *Kedar*, I mean to go abroad and converse in this wicked World? How dare they expose their Souls, which they tender next to their own, to such certain dangers in an Adulterous Generation, if to deny ones self, and resist the Temptations of the *Flesh* be either impossible, or next to impossible, as the injurious Discourses of the unclean Spirits of this licentious Age upon all occasions represent it to be?

My third Instance to prove how capable the nature of Man, by Gods Grace, is to resist or overcome the most dangerous Temptations, shall be taken from a Temptation to commit some Sin upon a certain proposal of gaining or loosing a *Crown*. Among all the Trials or Temptations the World, the Devil, or our own Hearts can present unto us, none can be more powerful or unconquerable than this: For a Crown is the highest secular Interest, the possession of it is both Government and Riches, and by consequence, the hopes of getting, or fear of loosing that supreme degree of Temporal Happiness, which consists  
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in the enjoyment of it, must at least to covetous, or ambitious Souls, be the strongest inducement that can be to Sin. And yet as powerful as this motive is, *Moses*, who might have passed for the Son of *Pharaohs* Daughter, and by consequence, have been Heir presumptive to his Crown, when he came to Years, (as the Author to the *Hebrews* writes) rather than renounce the Covenant, which his Ancestors made with God, Excommunicate himself from his visible Church, and forsake his Brethren, though the persecuted People of God, refused to be call'd, that is, to be the Son of that August Princess, and expect the most glorious Kingdom of the World. And not to ransack foreign Histories, or multiply Examples in this short Discourse, our late Sovereign *Charles* the Martyr, whom God was pleased to make perfect through sufferings, and reserve for these latter times, as the most glorious Monument of *Christian* Courage that ever was in the World. That incomparable Prince and *Christian*, rather than Rob God, prostitute his Royal Honour, justify Sacrilege and Rebellion by Law, and Perjure his Righteous Soul, by accepting those Sinful Conditions the Rebels proposed; after many other unparallell'd sufferings, chose to Sacrifice his Blood to his Conscience, and secure his Innocence by the loss of his Triple Crown.

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My last Instance to prove how capable Humane Nature in a *Christian* is to resist Temptations, shall be taken from the natural desire of *Revenge*, which of all other sinful affections, but Pride and Self-love, from whence it proceeds, discovers it self most early in Man: For with how much impatience and eagerness will even little Children strive to be revenged? How quickly will they resent, and how long remember injuries; and how will Malice, as it were, possess their little Souls; and Anger, the actual exercise of that Malice, swell their Hearts and Eyes? And how natural this Sin is to the corrupt constitution of Man, and how proper it is to some particular complexions and tempers; the *Brawls*, *Curses*, *Duels*, *Factions*, *Slanders*, *Libels*, *Murthers*, *Schisms*, and *Rebellions*, which happen in all Societies of Men, are most sad deplorable proofs. And yet if any Man deny that it is possible to mortifie this damnable passion of *Revenge*, wherein the Image of the Devil so much consists, he Libels the *Christian* Religion, and injures the Reputation and Authority of the Gospel, which teacheth Men to *forgive and love their enemies*, to *bless them that curse us*, and to *do good to them that hate us and despitefully use us*. This Doctrin is proper to the *Christian* above all the Religions in the World; God hath made it the very condition upon which he'l



he'll accept our Oblations, and grant us Pardon for our Sins; and therefore if thou bring thy gift before the Altar, and there remembreſt that thy Brother hath ought againſt thee, leave thy Gift there, and go thy way, thou muſt firſt be reconciled to thy Brother, and then return, and offer thy gift. And unleſs we can prevail with our ſelves to forgive men their treſpaſſes, the Oracle of our Religion hath aſſur'd us, 'tis in vain to Pray for the Pardon of our own. Therefore if it be impoſſible to reſiſt Temptations to this devilish Sin of Revenge; or which is all one, to Forgive the Enemy that ſtrike the firſt ſtroke, 'tis impoſſible to be Saved, or elſe all the Precepts of mutual forbearance and forgiving one another muſt paſs for Goſpel-gallantry, or only for the Romantick and Ornamental part of the *Chriſtian* Religion, which it concerns us not at all to practice or believe. But alafs, 'tis as eaſie to conquer this damnable Paſſion of Revenge, as to become Meek, and Humble, and Charitable; for the mutual exerciſe of which moſt excellent Graces, the Primitive *Chriſtians*, as *Marcellinus* hath obſerved, were famous among the *Heathens*, when Slanders, Quarrels, Bloodſhed, and all other Tragical effects of Revenge, were ſcarce ever heard of in the Church of God.

But beſides the Examples I have taken out of the

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the Bible, and other Sacred Histories to prove under these four Instances, that no Temptations are too strong to be overcome, let me add some examples out of *Heathen* and *Mahumetan* Historians for the further confirmation of this fundamental Truth.

Under my first Instance I might have produc'd a thousand illustrious Examples, as of *Socrates*, *Regulus*, *Curtius*; all which chose to dye very cruel Deaths: The first, rather than deny God; The second, rather than perjure his Soul; And the third, to deliver his Country from a Plague.

My second Instance I might have adorn'd with the memorable examples of *Scipio Numantinus*, and *Mahumet* the Great; whereof the first abhor'd to look upon that charming Beauty which his Captains presented unto him, as his prize: And the latter, after an humble remonstrance of his Lords, how much it was beneath the Majesty of the *Ottoman* Emperour to enslave it self to the Weaker Sex, immediately sacrificed his dearest *Mistress Irene* to his Honour, with his own victorious Hands. The Action was Barbarous, but the Self-denial was great, and may justly serve to upbraid those slothful cowardly *Christians*, who have not only lost all sense of Honour, but all sense and consideration of infinite future Rewards, and so harden their hearts, that they will not attend to  
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the dictates of their own Reason, and thereby dispose their Souls to hearken to the secret Directions and Inspirations of God. They could be content to have him for their Champion, but not for their Second; for they hate to assist him, or which is all one, to let him assist them against the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; but because they cannot do all, therefore they will do nothing, nor contribute that little they have left as men, to secure themselves from Sin. To conclude, they will not, like *Cornelius*, prepare themselves by Morality for Grace, but would have God entirely force their Nature, and influence their Souls by the irresistible motions of his Spirit; being unwilling to do so much in Spiritual Matters, as is requisite to denominate good Actions their own.

Under the third Instance I might have added the great Examples of *Abdolominus*, *Dioclesian*, and *Otho*; the first of which was unwilling to change a private Life for a Crown; The second chang'd, a Crown, I cannot say, but the Empire of *Rome*, which had *Crowned heads for Subjects*, for a private Life; And the third, though he was elected Emperor by his conquering Legions, refus'd to ratifie the Election by his Sword, but Kill'd himself, on purpose to leave the Imperial Seat to his Rival, and save the expence of his faithful Souldiers Blood.

The fourth Instance I might have confirm'd with the Testimony of the *Greek* and *Latin* Moralists, all which determin with one Voice, that Revenge is a Passion violent in none, but weak and cowardly Souls; and that to Revenge an injury, as the *Greek* word ἀνταποδιδόναι imports, is according to the Doctrin of *Maximus Tyrius*, to offer one again; so that he that Returns is as much to be condemned by the Verdict of right Reason, as he that gives an Affront.

And therefore since 'tis plain by these Examples, that bare Reason and *Moral Gallantry* of Spirit, have sometimes enabled *Heathens* and *Mahumetans* to resist those Pains, and Pleasures, and Interests, which, as all men grant, are the strongest Temptations to Sin; is it not shameful Non-sense, and horrid Impiety for *Christians*, whom God, without a just provocation, never fails to support and assist with his Grace, to magnifie the weakness of Humane Nature, and the strength of these and the like Temptations, with a Malicious design, nor only to justify themselves and excuse others, but to Debauch Mankind to the utmost of their power, and render the *Christian* the most grievous intollerable Religion that ever was in the World?

From whence I proceed to prove by Reason, that no Trial or Temptation can happen to Men,  
but

but such as is suitable to Humane Nature, aided with Grace, and such as any *Christian* that is true to his own endeavours, and faithfully uses the restraining and assisting helps of God, may not easily conquer and subdue.

My first Reason shall be taken from the consideration of the nature of *Virtue* and *Grace*, which are nothing, but an habitual power, and ability in the Rational Soul of Man, to bear all sensible Pain and Loss, and forbear all sensible Pleasure and Profit, out of love to Reason and the Righteous Laws of God. This excellent spiritual power and ability of the Soul, as far as it is Natural, or acquired by our own Acts and Endeavours, is of Moral consideration, but as it is supernaturally wrought in the Soul, or infus'd into it by the Spirit of God, so far it is of Theological consideration, and belongs not to Morallists, but Divines. But because Grace, as all Men grant, is the perfection of Nature, and acquired Virtue is consistent with infus'd; I have put them both together in one Definition, in which Divines and Philosophers both agree. But were it impossible, or so exceeding difficult as some Men make it, to resist Temptations; this definition of Grace or Virtue would be but an useless fictitious notion, and Divines and Philosophers from the beginning of the World. would have

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been either Knaves or Fools. All the excellent Sermons the former have made with so much eloquence and authority concerning *Mortification*, *Self-denial*, and *Perseverance*, and all the brave Discourses the latter have penn'd with such admirable Reason and Rhetorick, concerning *Fortitude*, *Temperance*, and *Patience*, are idle unprofitable Harangues, and as insignificant to the impotent Race and Nature of Man, as the practical Rules of Dancing to a Cripple, or a Lecture in *Geometry* to a natural Fool. In particular, St. Paul, who Magnifies the Grace of God so much in his Epistles, and protests he took pleasure in bearing *Reproaches*, *Persecutions*, and *Distresses* for *Christs* sake. This great Doctor and Saint, who declar'd upon his own experience, that he was alwaies most strong, when he was most weak, and that he could do and suffer all things through the strength he receiv'd from Christ, must pass for a Cheat, or Enthusiast, if Men by the promised supports and assistance of Gods Grace be not able to resist Temptations unto Sin.

There was never yet in the Church of God a more apt Example to confirm this Doctrin I now maintain, than this Apostle was; for when the *Jews* and *Gnosticks* persecuted his righteous Soul with so much rage and violence as to make him call them the *Messengers of Satan*, and compare the

the sharpness of the Persecutions, which they rais'd against him, to a *thorn in the flesh*; like a true Souldier of Christ, he still resisted and held out; but yet suspecting his own perseverance, and fearing lest his Faith and Patience might at last fail, he *Prayed God thrice* to remove the sharp Trials from him: But God, who knew whereof he was made, better than he himself, still continu'd them, assuring the suffering Apostle, that *his concurrent Grace was sufficient for him, and that his strength was made perfect in his weakness.*

This relation the Apostle makes of himself, is either true or false: If false, then he was either an *Impostor*, or a *Mad-man*: If he was Mad, as the *Festuses* of this Age represent him to be, how came he to speak the words of Truth and Soberness? How came he to write such learned and profound Epistles, and make such admirable defences for himself and the *Christian Religion*, before so many Procurators, and the Emperour himself at *Rome*? How came he to be so very Wise upon occasion, as to plead the Priviledge of a *Roman Citizen*, and divide the *Sadducees* against the *Pharisees*, when they had both conspir'd to take away his Life? How came he to baffle the *Jews* out of their own Traditions and Prophecies, to convert the greatest Cities of the World to the *Christian Religion*, and acquire such a particular



cular Veneration and Authority, not only among the common People, but among the Philosophers both of *Greece* and *Rome*? To conclude, how came the Church Universal to Canonize his Writings; and how came they particularly to be ador'd by such gallant Men as *Justin*, *Origen*, *Tertullian*, and *Clemens* of *Alexandria*, who were all as great Wits and Philosophers as ever the World could shew.

An Impostor likewise he could not be; for then he must have acted for Glory, or Gain. For Glory he did not; because he hath so often acknowledg'd his own Sinfulness, Unworthiness, and Insufficiency, representing himself as the *least of the Apostles*, and freely confessing that he was what he was by the Grace and designation of God. And for Gain or secular Interest he could not act, for in this Life, he was of all Men most miserable; his Apostolical Office rendring his whole Life but a continual Tragedy or Catalogue of Miseries; as you may read, *2 Cor.* 11. from the 23. to the end of the Chapter. This Story, then, I cited out of his Writings must be infallibly true; and if it be, then Virtue and Grace are *real notions*; and by consequence, no Temptation can happen to any Man, but what Humane Nature is able to bear. And lest you should think that God had a more particular care for this Apostle than other

*Christians,*



*Christians*, and supply'd him with more particular aids, than the rest of the Church, you may find him exhorting the whole Church of *Ephesus* to be *strong in the Lord and the power of his might*; you may find him charging *Timothy* to be strong in the grace that is in *Christ*; and exhorting the whole City of the *Philippians*, to work out their Salvation with care and sollicitude, because God, by his preventing and assisting Grace was working in their hearts both to Will and to Do. *Perseverance* or the working out of Salvation, consists in nothing but in constantly resisting Temptations to Sin; and there can be no sense in that, nor any other such like Exhortations, unless God (as the *Psalmist* speaks) be a present help in time of trouble, and his assisting Grace concur to the aid and relief of all those that need, and sincerely desire it; and, like the good and faithful Servant in the Gospel, improve it as fast as it is bestowed.

To all which let me add the Precepts of Mortification, Patience, and Self-denial; the Exhortations to keep our selves *Pure, Temperate, Sober, Chast*, to be *stedfast and unmoveable*, to be *stedfast to the end*, to *resist the Devil*, to *resist him unto Blood*: Of all which and the like Exhortations, if we consider God as the Original Author, it must needs follow, that Men in Covenant with him, have ordinarily power to resist the World, the Flesh,  
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and the Devil, nay to resist them all to Martyrdom, and to Blood. And therefore none but *Fools* and *Atheists* can be so absurd and impious as to imagin that God (with Reverence be it spoken) can so transgress the Rules of common sense, as to advise his Creatures to the practice of those Duties, which he knew before were impossible to be done. Nay this damnable assertion of the *Liber-tines* of this Age, (who, like that filthy Goat *Nero*, think all the World as lascivious as themselves,) robs God of his Goodness, by imagining he can delude his reasonable Creatures so far, as to put them upon the Practice of those Duties, which he knew were impracticable and above their Power to do. But God, that is better acquainted with our Nature than we our selves, can put us upon nothing, but what he knows is either absolutely in our power, or at least, as to conquer Temptations is, within the power of our Nature, assisted by Grace to perform. For this very reason it is, that God and the Church bind every *Christian* at his first admission into Covenant by such a solemn Oath to resist Temptations, as I mention'd in the beginning of this Discourse: the substance of which solemn obligation amounts to thus much; I do here in the presence of God, my Saviour, and all the Heavenly Host devote my self to the service of God; I call Heaven, and Earth, the Church

Church Militant and Triumphant to bear witness, that I renounce the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; and that I'll resist their Temptations to my last breath. This I avow to be my resolution; and upon this condition, and this alone, I now desire to enter into Covenant with my God, and be admitted into his Church; and I call my Conscience to Record this day, that I will never repent of this Promise, nor revoke it, but continue Christs faithful Souldier to the end of my Life: So help me, O my God. 'Tis impossible for the Conscience of Man, or Angel to be bound by a stronger Obligation than this; but unless the Matter of it be practicable, 'tis a solemn piece of Nonsense and Delusion; and God and his Church for above 1600 Years have mock'd and abus'd the World.

The second Reason, by which I undertake to prove my Assertion, shall be taken from the consideration of the nature of *Repentance*; which consists in an unfeigned sorrow for our Sins past, and a sincere Resolution by Gods assistance to lead an Holy Life for the time to come. But if Men be conscious to themselves, that the Sins they committed they could by no means resist, why should they sorrow and repent for what is past, or so contradict themselves, and mock God, as to promise amendment for the time to come? Why

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instead of confessing their Sins to him, do they not rather expostulate with him, and say, 'Tis true, O Lord, I have done many things which Men that pretend to be thy Ministers, and trouble the World by thy Authority, declare to be grievous Sins; but if they be, I protest I could not help it; Thou knowest I could not resist them; and if Thou wouldst have me do better for the time to come, thou must give me more Grace than hitherto I have had. Which horrible Expostulation shews how inconsistent this damnable Doctrin I oppose, is to the Duty of Repentance; how ridiculous it renders Confession and Contrition for Sin; nay how it makes the greatest Sins we are tempted to commit no Sins at all: And many more such dreadful consequences flow from it, as may justly make the *Blades* or licentious Wits, that talk it about the Town, if they have any Sense or Conscience left, to abhor it, and recant.

My third Reason is taken from the consideration of the Nature of Laws; which commonly, besides the things they command, or forbid, contain either general or special Threatnings and Promises, as most proper and suitable motives to engage us to perform the Duties we ought to do, and abstain from the Sins we ought not to commit: But if the free and rational Nature of Man, neither

neither simply in it self, nor with the assistance of God ; if Reason with, no more than without Grace, have power to overcome Temptations to wilful Sin, it would be transcendent Folly and Cruelty for Princes, and States to make Temporal Laws for their Subjects; and much more for God to make Spiritual Laws for his Church. He might with as much Wisdom and Justice have charged Men not to be Hungry, or Sick; not to be Hot, or Cold; as not to commit Adultery, not to Steal, not to Murther, not to bear False Witness, &c. unless by some means or other it be in their power to resist the strongest Temptations that the Wit of Men or Devils can invent, to induce them to commit the foresaid Sins.

My fourth Reason I ground on the 10th of *St. Matthew*, v. 33. where our Saviour declares that Whosoever shall deny him before Men, that him will he deny before his Father which is in Heaven: But were any Suffering so intolerably sharp, were any persecutions so dismal and grievous, that it were impossible for supported Humane Nature to bear them; were all the Torments of a *Roman Inquisition*, and all the Artifices of Cruelty, which Wit and Malice could invent, above the Courage and Resolution of a *Christian*, and insuperable by Reason, strengthened with Grace: The Blessed *Jesus*, who took our Infirmi-

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ties upon him, and knew by experience what Humane Nature was: He, I say, that was made like unto his Brethren, that he might be a Merciful and Faithful High-Priest, would never deny any Man a share in his Atonement, for doing that, which extremity of Torment must force him to commit.

To conclude with such another Reason: You may remember that our Saviour, in the Description he gives of Hell, in the 9th of St. Mark, hath this ingenious *Hebrew Phrase*, *Where their Worm dyeth not*; which *Worm*, according to the sense both of the *Jewish* and *Christian Church*, signifies nothing here; and in the 66th of *Isaiah*, but that Stinging remorse of Conscience, or continual Fret, or Vexation of Soul in Damned Spirits, caused by the remembrance, and consideration of the wilfull Treachery and Baseness of their own Hearts, in committing those Sins, and yielding to those Temptations, which they knew they had power sufficient to resist. But were the Damn'd Souls in Hell of this opinion, that it were impossible, or next to impossible, for Men to resist Temptations; were they conscious to themselves that they were overcome by all Temptations to which they yielded, because they wanted power sufficient to conquer them; what outward Tortures soever they may endure, they must needs  
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be free from inward Pangs and Torments, from that intolerable horror and remorse of Conscience which our Saviour calls the *Worm*, because, like a *Moth* or *Worm*, it constantly frets and gnaws upon the tenderest part of the Soul that breeds it, and increases the Torments of Hell more, than all the Rivers of Fire and Brimstone that constantly flow therein.

And thus, I hope, I have said enough to confirm and illustrate this great Truth, having prov'd it both by *Authority* and *Reason*; and charg'd the contrary error (or Blasphemy shall I say) with such absur'd and damnable Consequences, as may justly make any Man, that is not desperate, both ashamed and afraid to assert it in the presence of God, and reasonable Men. But we live (*God knows*) in a Nation and Age, wherein Sin and Nonsense are Presumptuous, and wherein 'tis long since become fashionable and gentile to question Principles, and deny all those fundamental Truths of natural and revealed Divinity, which neither *Heathens* nor *Christians* ever Questioned before. This is the reason, why Divines, whom God hath set for the service and defence of the Gospel, have of late been fain to lay the Foundations again, and Preach up such Doctrins as sober Men, not acquainted enough with the iniquity of the Times, have judg'd at first hearing,

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to need no proof: Such as the *being and providence of God*, the *immortality of the Soul*, and the *necessity of good works*; to which I may add the Subject of this Discourse, which hath been to prove, that no Temptations which God suffers to fall upon *Christians* are irresistible, or that no thinking, circumspect, vigilant Man, that's true to his own Reason, and careful to make use of the promised assistance of God, can be over-matched by any Trial, though never so sharp, nor meet with any Temptation too strong to be withstood, how delightful or charming soever it be.

And this Doctrin being proved by so many undeniable *experiments*, and *reasons*, I hope may be sufficient to demonstrate the Folly, and chastise the Insolence and Impiety of those Prophane Men, who, because they have enslaved themselves to their own Passions, affect to make Man like a Beast, (that is, like themselves) all Sense and Appetite, and represent him as determin'd in all his actions by outward objects, and unable to moderate his Lusts, and Fears. But had these Men but common Reverence for God, or Man, they would not so Libel the Nature of the latter, which is the workmanship of the former; they would be more modest and civil, than to define Humane Nature by their own Corruptions, or pretend to judge of the Thoughts, Actions, and Inclina-



Inclinations of all other Men by their own ; they would be more considerate and reserv'd , and not take a Pride to maintain and propagate an Opinion which is chargeable with such foul and absurd conclusions , and which shews them to be an inconsiderate sort of Men , that Think little , and Talk much , and makes them obnoxious to that dreadful curse pronounced by the Prophet against those , that *call good evil, and evil good ; that put light for darkness, and darkness for light ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

'T would be very seasonable for these Licentious Times, that such Blasphemers Tongues were restrained by severe Laws , that they might only discourse these, and their other pernicious Doctrins in their own *Cabals* , and not dare to divulge them, and corrupt and trouble the company of civil, and sober Men , with such damnable confident talk. But since these Mens Tongues are their own , and in this great defect of Civil and Ecclesiastical Censures, they take the liberty to speak of God and Man as they please , 'tis more necessary that they should be rebuk'd , and their horrid Opinions expos'd and confuted in the Pulpit , lest their Devilish Doctrin should spread , and corrupt the World like a Canker , while the Ministers of the Gospel hold their Peace.

As for this Opinion , it develts Man , as you have

have heard, of his better part, *viz.* his free and rational Nature, wherein the Image of God consists; it proves all Laws and Orders of Societies to be useless, insignificant, and unnatural Institutions; and so makes the Legislative Power, whether invested in God, or the King, to be Tyranny and Violence; and Men that live under Government to be worse Slaves, than the Children of *Israel* in *Ægypt*, where they were commanded to make *Brick, when they had no Straw*. It contradicts the Doctrinal and Historical parts of Scripture, and with unparallel'd Impudence, gives the Lye to the *Martyrologies* both of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Church. It contradicts the Definition of Virtue and Grace; in particular, it makes *Fortitude*, *Temperance*, *Self-denial*, *Patience*, *Sobriety*, *Chastity*, and all other infus'd and acquir'd Habits of resisting Sin, to be idle Fictitious notions; and so makes all the Divines and Philosophers that have ever been, to have been Impostors or Fools. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with the Doctrin of Repentance, and destroys the Goodness and Wisdom of God, who, upon the supposition that the Scriptures are true, hath exhorted his People to the practice of such Duties, which he knew before, they could not do. To conclude, it overthrows the Catholick Hypothesis of assisting Grace, dissolves the Obligation of our Sacramental

tal Vows, disarms Hell of the most exquisit part of its Torments, and confounds the notion of Good and Evil, by making it Lawful, in supposing it sometimes necessary for Men to commit the most heinous Sins. All which absurd and detestable Consequences, I hope, you now hear with *Christian* Indignation, and will remember hereafter with horreur and disdain, when ever you shall hear these sensual Men, like those that were sent to spy out the Holy Land, represent themselves and their Brethren, as *Grashoppers*; but their Spiritual Adversaries, the Temptors and Temptations with which they ought to conflict, as insuperable *Anakims*, as enemies of a prodigious stature, greater, and taller, and stronger than themselves. But these are usually Men, that have turn'd the grace of God into lasciviousness, whose glory is their shame, whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things. And because they have debauch'd themselves into Brute Beasts, or at least have a mind to do so, therefore (as St. Jude Speaks) they foam out their shame and infidelity in slandering the rational nature of Man, exploding the Doctrin of assisting Grace, Drolling upon Godly Men, and discrediting, as much as they can, the Authority of the Gospel, because it thwarts their Lusts, and disturbs their sensual repose, by Teaching, that Men by the grace of God have power to

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overcome the World, resist the Devil, and deny all ungodliness and worldly Lusts; and because it exhorts Men in Gods name to be patient, vigilant, and steadfast; to be sober, temperate, and chaste; to fight the good fight; to finish the course; and persevere unto the end. Lastly, because it assures us that God assists us in all our Spiritual Combats, supports us in all our Trials, and will make us more than Conquerours through Christ that loveth us; nay, that Christ himself, who hath suffered and been tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted; and that no Temptation hath taken us, but such as is moderate and common to Man; because God is faithful to his Promises, and will not suffer us to be Tempted above our strength, but will with the Temptation make a gracious way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

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**A** Letter to a Deist, in Answer to several Objections against the Truth and Authority of the Scriptures; Sold by *Moses Pitt*, at the *Angel* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*.

FINIS.